

**Remarks of Lt. Governor Becky Skillman at the
Indiana Veterans' Home
November, 11th, 2009**

I'm honored to be spending Veterans' Day at the Veterans' Home, with some of our bravest men and women.

You may recall Ronald Reagan saying "the scariest words in the English language to hear are.....I'm from the government, and I'm here to help."

Well, I am from the government, but I'm really here to thank you. I'm here with you to celebrate the brave Hoosiers who have served in our nation's armed forces.

John Stuart Mill said that "war is an ugly thing, but not the ugliest of things." The ugliest, would be having nothing to fight for – having nothing like freedom – so dear to us that we stand in the face of certain death to preserve it. Many brave men and women have lost their lives, because they stood up for us and for our way of life.

They took the burden of facing our enemies and telling them that there is a line no one will cross. Not when America—and Americans—are here to defend it.

President Eisenhower summed it up best when he said "a soldier's pack is lighter than a prisoner's chains." Every person in uniform knows what that means. They know what's at stake, and they prove over and over that they're the best and the bravest of our citizens.

This past week we were reminded, yet again, just how valuable those men and women are. The tragedy that shook Fort Hood, stopped us all in our tracks. Military families are all aware of the risks and challenges their service asks of them, but when lives are taken by one who wears the uniform, on one of our own bases, it's especially difficult to accept. Our thoughts and prayers go out to those stationed at Ft. Hood and all the families who've been affected.

I've had the sad privilege of greeting the caskets of fallen Hoosier soldiers as they've make their last trip home. And I've had the tremendous honor of working with our Indiana National Guard. And I've seen first hand why we are so proud of the men and women who fight for us. They put America's best foot forward. They tighten our grasp on freedom and make us bold when we're afraid.

Hoosier veterans have come to our aid when we needed them most. Generations have put others before themselves, left families behind, and selflessly risked their lives for the cause of freedom. And we know, for many of our veterans, the scars of battle and the memories of war will always be with them. For some, the real battle begins when they return home to deal with injuries, and regain their civilian lives. That is, in many cases, when the protectors become the protected.

Whether our veterans face the trials of Post Traumatic Stress Disorder, or a physical hurdle to jump, or just need help finding a new career path, we want to be there to help in any way we can. The first job of any government is to protect its citizens – and with that responsibility comes the duty to care for those who are doing the protecting.

That's why we have done our utmost in Indiana to care for our veterans. Long overdue benefits were signed into law in 2007, providing income tax deductions on military pay, tuition rate adjustments at our universities, and matching dollars for the Military Families relief fund. Now, we are better equipped to honor those who have given so much to defend our freedom - including those of you who call the Veterans Home, your home.

In March last year, control of the Veterans home was transferred from the state Department of Health to our Department of Veterans' Affairs. That change has had a significant and positive impact here.

Seventy miles separate the State House from the Veterans home. But that distance is no excuse for the poor communication and 'out of sight, out of mind' attitude the Veterans Home had to endure for so long. It sometimes got the attention it deserved, but all too often, it fell to the back burner.

Now, under the direction of the Department of Veterans' Affairs and Director Tom Applegate, the Home isn't just one of many priorities, it's the priority. And that's the way it should be. As an equal partner in state government, the Veterans' Home can now benefit from all the tools we have to make things easier and bring a higher quality of life to residents.

We recently acquired four new, historic buildings to add to the Veterans' Home campus. And there are continual efforts to improve the existing facilities with new sprinkler systems, roofing projects and housekeeping. There are also two new busses for residents – ready to take you where you need to go, whether you need to travel in a wheelchair or not.

This is occurring at a time when almost all areas of state government are seeing cutbacks.

I want to thank the staff here at the Veterans' Home. Superintendent Stewart and his team have done an excellent job over the past year and a half, and they're serving Hoosier Veterans proudly. I'm grateful to them for their full support and dedication here.

They are living out the motto I saw on one of the buildings, as I drove in today. It says, "We Serve Those Who Served." Every resident here has sacrificed something to serve our state and our country. And I can't think of a better way to express our love and gratitude than to emulate it. I am committed to standing by that motto myself – and I know the Veterans' Home staff is, too.

And, I have been so impressed with the unwavering support and hard work of groups like the AmVets, American Legion, the VFW and DAV. These groups have been tremendous

partners in the future of this facility, and we owe them a debt of gratitude for all they've done and continue to do.

And there's a growing number, and new generation, of Hoosier Veterans who need the services these support groups provide.

With so many Hoosiers in the military, every community has someone serving. Indiana is part of a nation at war. And we're doing our part—and more. While we are just the 16th most populous state, our National Guard is the 4th largest in the nation. That is something we can all be proud of.

We've always had heroes to champion in this country. And our men and women in uniform have always been our most precious resource. We are humbled by, and grateful for, the service of the troops and the sacrifice of their families – We understand, it's no easy thing to serve in any branch of the armed forces.

But I often hear veterans tell me they'd go back and do it again in a heartbeat. Even the newest recruits are ready to go to work, doing the jobs that others are, either unable or unwilling to do.

Our veterans embody so many of the qualities we value as Hoosiers – honor, trust, diligence and leadership. Those qualities are not necessarily unique to any one group of people, any one gender, or any one age group – but our military has a way of attracting the strongest and the bravest. The challenges of basic training and active duty, strike fear in the faint of heart, but excite the leaders among us.

In my office, we have a small staff, but with a particularly strong military presence. I've got a Navy officer, an Air Guard Officer, an Army National Guardsman, and a former Army wife working in my office. So supporting our military is a big priority for us – and it's personal. We're always looking for ways to keep morale up, and we've found one of the best ways to do that is through the mail.

We think about our troops all year long, but it's especially hard on them to be away during the holidays. So, for the past four years, my office has collected thousands (20,000 last year) of Holiday cards and letters for our troops and sent them over to Iraq and Afghanistan. This year, we're doing that again, and hope to do it bigger and better, with a wider distribution. We call our letter drive "Hoosier Cheer for Our Heroes," and I hope we can send a flood of encouragement and praise this year, and you are invited to help us.

We want to support our active duty military in every way we can, and we know that service doesn't end when they go back to civilian life. Far from it. As civilians, our veterans are important players in our communities, and Hoosiers recognize that.

A few months ago, I was at Purdue for an excellent new program they call an Entrepreneurial Boot Camp for Disabled Veterans. This was a week-long intensive

course for veterans with business ideas. The program helps them get a head start on the next chapter of their lives, and start new careers in business. I was impressed, not only with the course work, but most importantly with the veterans enrolled in the program. They have big dreams and the discipline and work ethic to back them up.

And another great program is operating out of Crane Naval Base. The Learning and Employment Center for Veterans with Disabilities provides training and full-time employment at Crane.

So there are good things going on across the state. Our veterans are some of our most skilled and determined people. They've worked hard, and we're doing what we can to give them the opportunities to succeed, when active duty is behind them.

No matter how you are connected to your military community – as a veteran, or the spouse of a veteran, a volunteer, or staff at the veterans' home, – I hope you feel the pride that is rightfully yours.

I'll never forget the pride and patriotism I felt, when I met with the survivors of the USS Indianapolis, and families of those lost at sea. We dedicated a museum memorial to their infamous voyage during WWII, when their ship was sunk by the Japanese. I watched those aging sailors walk silently through the exhibit. They looked at the pictures of their much younger faces that were cheery with purpose, and they relived their voyage all over again. I hope they took some comfort in the long-overdue memorial for them, and for their fallen comrades.

It's up to us to remember our military heroes – past and present. We have no future at all, if we forget where we've come from, and the battles we have already fought – and won.

If America forgets its defenders, we ourselves will soon be forgotten. So, lest we forget – this day we remember all veterans – the fallen, the survivors, and those who continue the fight.

Thank you.